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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 DOHA 000849

SIPDIS

STATE FOR NEA/ARPI, NEA/RA, G/TIP, DRL, INL

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TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [ELAB](#) [KCRM](#) [QA](#)

SUBJECT: QATAR: UPDATE ON UNDERAGE CAMEL JOCKEYS

REF: DOHA 833

Classified By: Ambassador Chase Untermeyer for reasons 1.4 (A) and (B)

1. (U) Summary. Recently concluded camel races in Qatar provided an opportunity to learn about the child camel jockey situation in Qatar. While the findings point to a significant problem, recent statements and pledges by government officials suggest that the GOQ may finally be taking some important steps toward addressing the issue of underage camel jockeys (reftel). End Summary.

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Post's Findings  
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2. (U) On April 10-20th, regional camel races for the GCC countries were held in Qatar. Discussions with child jockeys, a local employee, and an Imam suggested that there are over four hundred children residing in Qatar for use as camel jockeys. Approximately 95% of the children observed are Sudanese, with the remaining 5% from Somalia, Bangladesh and Nepal. Sources also alleged that hundreds of additional children were brought into Qatar from the GCC countries for the regional races and that they did not pass through Qatar's Immigration Department.

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Day at the Races  
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3. (U) Attempts by Embassy representative on the first day of the races to speak with and photograph child jockeys met with resistance. Children accompanied by guardians refused to have their pictures taken. When asked why, some answered that showing their photos in the newspaper was "not good." (Note: Initial pictures taken were confiscated by authorities at the racetrack who advised that photos could only be taken from the spectators' stands. End Note.) The children agreed to talk or have their photos taken only when they were alone or in a secluded area. An Embassy representative spoke with a few children, between four and six years of age, who were barefoot, received little schooling, and claimed that they had little to eat. One boy stated that his father refused to send him to school because "school spoils boys." When asked about his father, the boy explained that this was not his real father, but that he was asked to call the man "father."

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The View From the Racetrack  
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4. (U) Over eight hundred children from various GCC states were observed participating in the semi-final races. During the fifth round, two camels were observed coming through the finish line without jockeys. When asked about the missing jockeys it was commented that the jockeys must have fallen off the camels onto the racetrack. After a few minutes an ambulance drove by carrying the two children who had fallen. In the eighth round another child fell from his camel at the take-off point and he was placed immediately into an ambulance.

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Interview with the Imam  
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5. (U) A Sudanese Imam of a local mosque alleged that the number of underage children living at the racing compound exceeded six hundred and that children as young as two and a half years have been brought to Qatar for training. The Imam stated that the children slept little as they got up at 4:30 in the morning for training. During the day the children are kept constantly moving from place to place so that they do not gain weight. While some real fathers did bring their own children to be employed as camel jockeys, the Imam maintained that the majority of the children's designated guardians were not their real fathers. Some of the guardians paid the real fathers in order to bring their children to Qatar to work as camel jockeys. The guardians tell the parents that there are good schools in Doha and that their child will get the opportunity to work and study at the same time.

6. (U) The Imam also stated that at least six children died

each year during the training and the races. Many more are severely injured. Children receiving light injuries are not taken to the hospital but are taken care of by their guardians. The Imam stated that pleas to officials in the Sudanese Embassy went unheeded as the officials maintained that they could not provide help or services to anyone who left Sudan illegally.

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The Obstacles  
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17. (U) Sheikha Ghalia Bint Mohamed Al-Thani, the first cousin of the Emir, Deputy Chairperson of Human Rights Committee and a pediatrician by profession, is the strongest proponent of banning the use of children as camel jockeys. She has admitted her frustration in trying to get legislation passed on this issue. Legislation supporting the recent Cabinet announcement banning the use of children as camel jockeys has yet to be enacted. One of the main sticking points centers on what penalties to set. Sheikha Ghalia also expressed concern about progress on this issue as the TIP Implementation Committee, which she headed, recently dissolved. The Committee had only a year's mandate. Sheikha Ghalia has expressed an interest in establishing a shelter for the children and in working with Ansar Burney, a Pakistani human rights activist working on the same issue in the UAE in this endeavor.

18. (U) Sheikha Ghalia also alluded to strong local support for camel racing as a major obstacle to making progress on this issue. Prominent members of the ruling family are strong supporters of camel racing. Other factors include prestige and money. The camel that won the first prize at the race was sold for over one million dollars. The Emir, Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al-Thani, and his son Sheikh Tamim, the heir apparent, both presided over the final races and presented awards to the winners, demonstrating that the sport of camel racing remains important to Qatar's culture and heritage.

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Official Responses  
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19. (C) In response to the prospect of being downgraded to Tier 3, the Minister of State for Foreign Affairs met with the Ambassador on May 5th and promised to "completely solve" the problem of underage camel jockeys. The Minister announced the Cabinet's decision to ban the use of young boys as camel jockeys and expressed the Ministry's commitment to working with the Embassy in providing shelter and repatriating the young boys. Post is awaiting the MFA about arrangements for a follow-on visit to the racing camp to check out claims of a shelter and to assess the needs of the boys (reftel).

UNTERMEYER